



Research on mistreatment of older adults in Quebec:

summaries of scientific articles



The Health and Social Service Needs of Gay and Lesbian Elders and Their Families in Canada.

REFERENCE

Brotman, S., Ryan, B., & Cormier, R. (2003). The Health and Social Service Needs of Gay and Lesbian Elders and Their Families in Canada. *The Gerontologist*, 43(2), 192-202.

TEXT TYPE

Format: Scientific article

Content: Empirical

DISCUSSED THEMES

Extent of the phenomenon, risk factors, consequences, prevention, intervention, organization of services, burdens and stress, homophobia, sexual orientation, discrimination, health care.

GOAL OR RESEARCH QUESTION

This study aims to better understand the needs of elderly homosexuals in terms of health and social services, as assessed by the views of various players in the community, both professionals and activists.

PROBLEM

Gays and lesbians of all ages are victims of discrimination in the health and social services system. This discrimination has been identified as homophobia or heterosexism, and is even more pronounced among homosexual elderly. Because of this discrimination and of the invisibility of these people, their needs are not addressed by the existing health and social services. This is also by the fact that little research has been done on the subject so far.

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study used a qualitative approach and was deployed through four focus groups conducted in three Canadian provinces: a group in Quebec, one in Nova Scotia and two in British Columbia. Participants were recruited by the snowball method. The groups were composed of both senior homosexual activists and their families, involved in community organizations, as well as of professionals from the public health system, some working in direct care and others in administration, and of members of several important seniors' groups, such as those that represent family caregivers.

RESULTS

Past experiences of discrimination have undermined the trust of homosexual seniors in the health and social services network. Moreover, despite numerous favorable changes in the recognition of gay rights in Canada that have occurred in recent years, there is still discrimination in various environments and institutions. Homosexual seniors often go unnoticed, since they do not reveal their sexual orientation because of previous experiences. This is an important obstacle for the recognition of their life experience and of their specific needs, which have been so far ignored by professionals. In the gay community, which has a very youthful image, few services are available to seniors. Education and awareness should be prioritized among health professionals, as well as in society in general, in order to improve the services offered to this population.

DISCUSSION

The invisibility of older homosexuals is explained, among other factors, by the fact that they have learned to hide their sexual orientation in order to avoid discrimination. Moreover, past experiences have helped them develop a high resilience in the face of adversity and to learn to fend for themselves, without relying on public health and social services, except as a last resort. Moreover, for many reasons, the topic of sexuality is often avoided with seniors, making it difficult to understand the specific concerns of older homosexuals.

CONCLUSION

Homosexual seniors have experienced exclusion and discrimination throughout their lives. It is essential ensure access to services for these people so that they can experience a more harmonious old age.

AVENUES FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

To ensure that homosexual elders of today and tomorrow can benefit from the services which meet their needs, it is necessary to develop strategies for the protection of their rights, as well as for training and awareness.

DRAFTING DATE

May 09, 2014

